

Transcript of interview conducted May 25 2017

Interviewees: ROBIN WILLES (RW) and MARGARET WILLES (MW)  
Interviewer: JAREK ZABA (JZ)  
Also present: JAN THIELEN (JT)  
Kingston-upon-Thames, England

Transcription: JAREK ZABA

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**[0:00:00] JZ: Ok so this is Jarek Zaba at the Creative Youth offices in Kingston recording an oral testimony interview with Margaret and Robin Willes. I'm here with...**

**JT: Jan Thielen.**

**[00:12] JZ: And...**

RW: Robin Willes.

MW: Margaret Willes.

**[00:19] JZ: And if you could say your date of birth and where you were born.**

RW: I was born in Epsom on the 19th January 1941.

MW: Margaret Willes, I was born in Ewell in 3rd January 1945.

**[00:39] JZ: Lovely. Ok guys, I'd just like to start by - this is all about Kingston, so I think I'd like to start by just exploring your guy's history and relationship with the town itself. Were you brought up in Kingston? What's your relationship? We'll start with you Robin...**

RW: Yeah. Kingston was always the 'big shop'. If you wanted to go to the big shopping centre, it was Kingston. And we'd go there on the 418 bus that still runs.

**[01:12] JZ: So you were brought up separately in Epsom was it?**

RW: In Ewell.

**[01:16] JZ: In Ewell. But Kingston was just a place you'd visit just for the shopping?**

RW: That's right. The main thing you'd come to Kingston for as a kid was the shopping. And then latterly when the music scene started to interest me, in the 50s and 60s, it was also the place to go.

**[01:37] JZ: So as a kid would you go up with the family to shop in Kingston?**

RW: Usually with my mum.

**[01:43] JZ: Lovely. And Margaret, your sort of history...**

MW: Yes I used to shop and favourite places we used to have lunch or a cup of tea in [Jay Lines] which was in Thames Street. Or in Bentalls there was the Silver Cafe which was a self service. And if you were really posh you went to the Tudor restaurant in Bentalls which was quite fancy but - yes it was just for shopping, got the bus in and it's where you went.

**[02:16] JZ: And when you were growing up - either of you - was Kingston a kind of lively place? Was it seen as a vibrant place for arts and culture or any of that sort of stuff or was it the shopping that was kind of -**

MW: It was the shopping.

RW: The shopping was the main thing, yes. The culture side of Kingston seemed to bloom much later.

MW: I think our parents weren't into that kind of -

RW: Exactly yes.

MW: We used to go to the cinema where Wilkos is. I remember going to the cinema and having tea before or after the cinema. Because that's - there was a big cinema there.

RW: We didn't eat out much. We took sandwiches, we were a bit downmarket compared to Margaret.

**[03:05] JZ: It's interesting you mention your parents. You think your parents not being of a sort of artsy culture or scene, that sort of had influence maybe?**

MW: Mine definitely weren't.

RW: No, I don't think mine were. Dad was - did classical music and he played - he worked at one of the Epsom mental hospitals. And he played in the band for the patient's dance, that was the highlight of the fortnight at the hospital where he worked.

**[03:36] JZ: What decade are we talking when you guys are being brought up and coming into Kingston?**

MW and RW: 50s.

RW: And by the 60s we were coming on our own, without parents.

**[03:49] JZ: And were you - this is slightly separate to the music scene - but were aware of this US army presence at Bushy Park?**

RW: No, no. Oblivious to that.

**[04:00] JZ: That's fine -**

MW: We used to come through - and maybe walk through Home Park to Hampton Court. But Bushy Park was off - it wasn't on the route. It was -

RW: Too far.

**[04:14] JZ: And where did you guys meet if you don't mind me asking?**

MW: 1963 at the Toby Jug at Tolworth.

**[04:21] JZ: At the Toby Jug.**

RW: Toby Jug in Tolworth. Yeah. And it was somebody's -

MW: It was a 21st birthday party and an engagement party. I knew the girl and he knew the fella.

RW: Yep. And -

MW: And I wouldn't know - no way. The only reason I knew her, I went to guides with her. I wouldn't have known her otherwise. So it was just - yeah it was pure chance. Didn't go to school, didn't live anywhere near me. We went to guides together.

**[04:50] JZ: That's interesting. Was the Toby Jug known as a music venue at that stage?**

RW: Yes.

MW: Mmm yes. It was a function room.

RW: The function room got hired by bands that we used - we saw. Now [Head, Hands and Feet] I think I saw there. We saw Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac and several other bands.

MW: We had to sit outside once.

RW: Yes that was -

MW: It was full inside so we sat outside.

RW: It was totally full when we got there. And you went in and the atmosphere was 10% cannabis I think. [Laughs] In the air. And you'd get stoned just by going in there.

**[05:42] JZ: And so did you make it in to see Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac?**

RW: No we sat outside. Sat outside - could hear perfectly.

**[05:50] JZ: So you could hear - you heard?**

MW: Oh yes.

RW: They had to open - the band was there. He said gesturing. And the French windows were behind where the band was and we sat outside the French windows. And - OK so the band had their backs to us but we got the full benefit of -

**[06:06] JZ: And how did they sound?**

RW: Fantastic.

**[06:09] JZ: Were Fleetwood Mac known at that point nationally, internationally?**

RW: Yeah, yeah. They got records out, yeah.

MW: Oh it was quite a big place to be -

RW: I can't remember the other bands that we saw there. This was - would have been 67ish.

MW: 66.

RW: 66, 67. I think we were married by that time we were going there.

MW: Can't remember.

**[06:35] JZ: Because are you aware of David Bowie launching Ziggy Stardust from the Toby Jug as well?**

RW: Yes. But I was - I'm afraid to say I was never a great fan of David Bowie. [Laughs]

**[06:45] JZ: That's fine, you're allowed to not be a fan of David Bowie. It's just - Toby Jug is a very interesting place for these one off gigs that seemed to happen. Let's go backwards a bit - you said Kingston was originally a shopping place for you and not a music place. When - do you remember the first time or one of the first times where it - you started associated Kingston with a music scene?**

RW: I think that would have been the barge. The folk music. There was a barge opposite - is it River House? Where the university's got a place. Opposite there -

MW: Where Turks have got there. Down - wharf - whatever they call it there. Jetty.

RW: There was this barge and they had the folk evening and you'd go along and you'd do a couple of numbers yourself. And the - all these folk clubs they'd get one good named act in. And the rest was just people who turned up. And it was great. Pete Stanley and Wizz Jones and people like that.

MW: I came one of the mothers in my class at school came and bought us tickets for a - for the Granada show. And we must have been - it must have been about 1960 I think. And we saw Joe Brown, the Vernon girls, and Billy Fury were the three I remember. And we sat there and screamed the whole time because that's what you did. [Laughs]

**[08:25] JZ: That's an interesting perspective actually because you read a lot about the screaming girls, the hysterical screaming girls. But I've never actually spoken with someone who was one of those screaming girls.**

MW: You just did it, you know you did, that's what you did. [Laughs]

RW: Sometimes you couldn't hear the music for the girls screaming.

**[08:45] JZ: Those three acts you mentioned there, what kind of music are we talking? Billy Fury is a name I recognise.**

MW: Oh rock n roll.

RW: Rock n roll.

MW: Oh Joe Brown's still about.

RW: A fantastic musician.

MW: And the Brothers.

RW: Joe Brown and the Brothers, yes.

MW: Was his backing - and presumably they were there as well.

RW: I saw Joe Brown - I remember seeing Joe Brown in Kingston but I can't remember who the other acts were. It must have been the same show that Margaret went to. Dion, Bobby Vee, Del Shannon.

These were all 60s rock n roll acts. And we were talking to a chap this morning at the coffee morning and he said he saw Little Eva at the Granada and I said did she do The Loco-motion? Oh yes! Because we play that at the ukelele group we do, The Loco-motion.

**[09:38] JZ: Let's talk about your own personal relationship with music. So you play Robin? When did you start playing and what's your story with that?**

RW: I had abortive piano lessons with a not very good piano teacher that I later discovered also tried to teach Margaret the piano.

MW: Yes. [Laughs]

RW: Many years later the skiffle scene began. And must have - sometime in the 50s, I was still at school. And Dad by this time had stopped playing double bass in the band at work and he was playing guitar so there was a guitar in the house. And I thought I will try this - I heard Lonnie Donegan and I thought, I'll have a go at this. This could pull the birds I thought. And I taught myself to play the guitar. And having done this I was chatting to a chap at school, Dave [Howscoe] and he says oh, there's a chap up my road getting a skiffle group together. Do you want to be in it? And I said yeah, OK. Sounds good. Can you play in the key of E? And I quickly learned. And met up with - Dave [Howscoe] was the drummer. A chap called Robin Lee who played double bass that he'd built himself. And this guy from up the road - James Patrick Page. Who played the guitar a bit. Was learning to play the guitar. And me on the guitar and singing. And we were the J G Skiffle Group. And of course you can see us on YouTube - there's a famous clip from Huw Wheldon's All Your Own show on the BBC all those years ago. Then latterly - after the skiffle it went a bit quiet. I used to play now and again in the folk clubs. And then I got lured into the church band and I now play in the church worship band. Have been for about 25 years. And also a barn dance band. So I keep at it. Margaret plays the recorder.

MW: I had piano lessons. Forcibly you had to learn - when you were young you had to learn to play the piano. And the teacher - you played tunes you didn't know what they sounded like so it was awful.

RW: You knew you were going to be several years before you could play something that you wanted to play.

MW: Then I learnt to play the recorder in school. Which I still play now. I just pick it up and play it. And I play from one - a tiny one that I can just get my fingers on through various ones. And recently I've learnt to play the ukulele as a project.

RW: [inaudible] the three instruments the ukulele, the bagpipes, and the bugle which were just on that knife edge between instrument and weapon.

MW: But it's fun the ukulele, we play it at church group.

RW: Yes after the worship band's practised has on the Thursday night the ukes come in.

MW: Yes it's fun.

**[13:12] JZ: I find this skiffle - I didn't know anything about this skiffle before I started this project.**

MW: That's another thing I had - actually the double bass. It's not a full size tea chest but he built me a small - and I would do the double - the bass, the tea chest bass.

RW: You were aware of - the tea chest and the broom handle -

MW: And a piece of string.

RW: - and it becomes a double bass.

MW: And you vary the note by the tension on the string. So you can tighten it or loosen it.

**[13:49] JZ: From what I gather from skiffle it's a kind of DIY rock n roll.**

MW: Oh yes.

RW: Yes. It was the cheap version of rock n roll -

MW: And a washboard.

RW: And we'd heard Bill Haley and the Comets on the - what was the film, Blackboard Jungle? That's rock n roll, wow! And I heard Chuck Berry for the first time - I can visualise it now. I've got the radio - the homemade one valve radio that you'd tune it and you could get American Forces Network. And the guy comes on and he says 'well I'm gonna play twice this week because everyone's requested it, Chuck Berry - Roll Over Beethoven'. And that was it. I was hooked. Rest of your life - rock n roll music will be a major component.

MW: In the - saying the DIY. A washboard - it's what your mum used to scrub your washing on before you had a washing machine. And they used to use that, like thimbles on it.

RW: It became an important rhythm instrument in the skiffle group.

MW: And then - they still sound - a friend of ours when we set up a skiffle group, he actually bought one school's music instruments, actually supplied said things. Washboard, not for washing on but for music. Now it's -

**[15:14] JZ: I'm reading a book which has a Lonnie Donegan quote in which he says that his kind of aim was to get everyone just picking up any old stuff you could find and he sort of says - he kind of described it in very grand terms - but he was talking about the English had lost their common relationship with the folk music of the past and it become the preserve of the kind of rich and upper classes and he wanted to give it back by making it accessible by going you only have to know three chords and you only have to have -**

MW: Well the ukulele is gradually improving our number of chords but -

RW: Oh when we found the fourth chord... [Laughs]

MW: Some of them are just three chords we played. It's there. I was surprised myself that I managed to play it.

**[16:02] JZ: I really like this story of hearing Chuck Berry on the American Forces Radio.**

RW: I can see it now, I'm sitting here with this blooming one valve radio. [Makes siren noise]. [Puts on American accent] We're American Forces Network.

**[16:14] JZ: I mean that American Forces radio was probably there because of the soldiers based at Bushy Park.**

RW: I think it was more for Germany. Don't forget this would be - the amateur radio that my dad brought with involved putting a huge aerial from the top of our house in Danetree Road down to the far end of the garden. Enormous length of wire. So that one could pick up the distance stations. I think it was mainly for

the forces posted in Germany.

MW: That - 50s - and that - the only pop was Radio Luxembourg.

RW: Yes.

MW: And that came and went but and the bit - I assume it came from Luxembourg.

RW: It did yes. That was a great disappointment for me - when we were in Luxembourg several years ago. There was the building and it said the Radio Luxembourg building.

MW: But that was just pop.

RW: And apparently they just put on tapes and played them on the transmitter there. The tapes had been recorded in London. They were recorded in the UK and they went - and they put the tapes on.

MW: And that was before you got the pirate ships like Radio Caroline.

RW: Yes because you could get Radio Caroline, Radio London.

MW: Jackie - we listened to Jackie when it was in the back of a van. We sat - we've been cut off. [ ] started to listen to it until it went off.

RW: It was - on one occasion it was being transmitted from a house just up the road from us in River Way. And they were aware of the - it was the postmaster general' men that policed it. They were coming down the road and they leapt out of the back bedroom window with the valves out of the transmitter, still hot in their hands. And of course the guys came in and they didn't catch them transmitting.

MW: So that was what you listened to. Jackie - we were great - we still are great fans of Jackie but it's -

RW: The BBC radio - it was just limited to so many hours a week of pop music. And that wasn't enough for us.

MW: That was before Radio 1, Tony Blackburn and all that.

**[18:49] JZ: What - do you know what year was Radio Jackie first came out? Or what year you first remember?**

RW: Wow. It would've been the 60s, wasn't it?

MW: 60s, 70s. It went on quite a long time.

**[19:03] JZ: And that was pirate radio initially?**

RW: Pirate radio.

MW: Yeah - they were - yes before [ ] now.

RW: The offshore stations lasted the best. But then the - you've seen the film The Boat That Rocked?

**[19:13] JZ: I have not.**

MW: That's about radio.

RW: See, that's about - it's based - loosely based on facts. And it's quite informative. Bill Nighy in it.

MW: It was on the other day.

**[19:29] JZ: So this moment when you heard Chuck Berry. What year would that have been do you know?**

RW: Now then. 50-something. I hadn't got a motorbike. I went up the road and - I did my homework - went up the road, tested my new model aeroplane, came back, got on the radio. 56, fifty- yeah, oh no no no no. 55 perhaps. 55.

**[20:06] JZ: And in terms of rock n roll was that something that was well known in the UK at that time? Or was this something you would only pick up through something like -**

RW: Oh it hit you like a - [laughs] - a barrel of stones. It was so different.

MW: Oh yes. The stuff you'd listen to before then was -

RW: Went from guys singing about [imitates] Mona Lisa-aaa, men have named you. And suddenly it's there. This is it. This is the stuff. It's got a back beat you can't lose it, any old time you use it. Gotta be rock n roll music.

MW: When my sisters was five years older than me, and in that five years you changed from being what your mother wore, like your mother, to teenagers appeared. The difference in that time from what -

**[20:59] JZ: From one sibling to the next?**

MW: Yeah.

RW: Yeah.

MW: And things like - when I was at school, Cliff Richard appeared. I liked Tommy Steele. I was a great fan of Tommy Steele. And I remember when I first started work The Beatles appeared. And I remember - one of - somebody I worked with, came in there, first EP record. Oh we said, you'd never think - ask you about them next year you won't know anything about them. Oops. [Laughs] So we - it was that era. I was never - I suppose I never had the money to go buying the records and everything what people did. But I know the first - we had an old wind up gramophone. And before - and then eventually we got an electric one. And it was in Hernando's Hideaway, Magic Moments - but they were the start of - people followed these - but they weren't quite the impact as what followed. That was 50s. So my sister being that bit older, she bought -

RW: Someone else who got famous from Kingston area. Born in Tolworth was Peter King. He's the man - modern jazz alto sax player. He's terrific. He lives in Putney now. He's had a hard time one way or another. And he's - is he slightly younger than - about my age. 76 now. But he is - he looks very poorly when he comes on stage but he puts that horn in his mouth and he flies.

**[23:04] JZ: I think I've got the name jotted down somewhere to look into. Interesting you mention jazz because what we're looking at over this period of time - there's numerous different genres and they're interconnecting and they're overlapping and all the rest of it. Did jazz play a role in your lives growing up?**

RW: Yes so in the 60s - maybe the 50s - perhaps 59ish at what is now Kingston University art college, it was - was it Kingston College of Art then? Some guys got together and became the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band. Doo Dah by the time they got to make records - Dada, as in art. An art form - Dada art. Do what



you like - do something different. The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, and I still talk to a very good friend of mine, Roger Wilkes who was the cornet player in the Bonzos.

MW: And they turned into some quite sedate and normal gentlemen when you see them now.

RW: Yes, they morphed into a - they became another band Bill Posters Will Be Band. They used to play at the Bull's Head at Barnes but they've disbanded now because they're getting on a bit.

MW: They were fun.

**[24:35] JZ: So there wasn't really a sense that you were - or was there - that you were aware rock n roll or you were jazz or you were blues. Was it just everyone was kind of getting into everything?**

RW: There was a bit of compartmentism. Yes - because there was the mods and rockers came along. And if you rode a motorbike you listened to rock n roll. And if you rode a scooter, you were more towards what you didn't regard as - you know it was The Kinks and Dedicated Follower of Fashion, The Kinks. And the - Adam Faith and those sort of people rather than the storming rock n roll.

**[25:27] JZ: And jazz sits separately as a kind of - the trad jazz?**

RW: Yes all the trad jazz - they would never have got on the same bus as rock n rollers.

**[25:39] JZ: Yeah. I had a guy here on Monday who was a guy who organised club nights, but trad jazz club nights. And I didn't quite realise that level of distinction - I was trying to push him towards the fact that Eel Pie Island in Richmond used to be a jazz venue. But I think by the time it very much a rock venue, he was not interested in it.**

RW: It was blues and then it was the - there was the blues rock. The - what was that chap - Bryan Jones's Rolling Stones. I saw them in Sutton - at the Red Lion in Sutton. Ridiculously small venue. I didn't realise they were going to be so big.

**[26:22] JZ: Yeah, what was that set like? What are your memories of that?**

RW: Well it was just a rough and ready blues band. Yeah.

MW: Oh nothing was like what you go to now. We went the O2 to see Status Quo in December and when you see what's there -

RW: And the quality of the sound and everything, it's a whole quantum leap different now. It was raw stuff in the 50s and 60s.

**[26:55] JZ: Sure. And you mentioned seeing the Stones at that time - in Sutton was it?**

RW: Sutton yeah, the Red Lion in Sutton.

**[27:03] JZ: Because what I'm finding out which I wasn't - I had a hint but I wasn't aware of - it's not just - we're focusing on Kingston but Southwest London in general had this real kind of scene. When you were part of it did you think that you were part of a region where important things were happening musically? Or was it -**

RW: I think so. I think because you'd get - Eric Clapton when he joined the Yardbirds. And that - we were aware that this was something special.

MW: Well we were in the London area weren't we? Isn't it the centre of everything? [Laughs]

RW: I regard myself as a blues man from the Wandle Delta. [Laughs]

**[27:45] JZ: But you would see people like - did you happen to see Clapton before he went onto bigger things?**

RW: Yes. I saw Eric Clapton -

**[27:53] JZ: And was there any sense that these guys were destined for the top?**

RW: Well we thought that they were damn good because you never know. Like the Beatles - Margaret's friends thought they were good. But they didn't know they were going to suddenly be huge.

**[28:12] JZ: So in terms of your - you said you started going on the Folk Barge, you started visiting various venues. Did Kingston - did it start becoming a regular place to visit?**

RW: I think so yeah. There was the Surbiton Assembly Rooms. There was a blues - a folk club there. And they get the big name in and the rest of us used to come in and do a couple of numbers and one week they got the chap called Jesse Fuller who - a fantastic old American artist. He played the guitar and the mouth organ and the kazoo and the high hat cymbal and the sort of - think cross between double bass and the piano - at the same time. He was fabulous. And what was the couple of guys that turned up at Epsom Folk Club? Now what was -

MW: They were called Simon and Garfunkel.

RW: Yes. They'd come over to England and done the folk music circuit. Played at all these little tin pot venues. And you used to get ten bob for playing at the Epsom Folk Club. And she got paid. Ten bob. And these two guys - they'd gone and gone on, become famous. And all these places where they'd played said can you come back next year? Oh yeah, OK. And they honoured this circuit - they'd - suddenly they were top ten musicians. And they honoured all these little tin pot folk clubs throughout the UK. Which was marvellous.

**[30:01] JZ: That is incredible.**

MW: A lot of the people - as I say, I followed Tommy Steele. I've [ ] in like half a sixpence. And I saw another show - I can't remember what it was at Wimbledon Theatre. And Adam Faith again - he went to the stage and I saw him in Alfie at Wimbledon. It was just amazing that he'd gone into theatre when he was doing the bit that he said out to the audience, there were tears coming down. And he - it was sponsored by one of the shops in Wimbledon. And he actually came to the shop the next day. And I have actually got a photo and the programme signed. And he was little.

[Both laugh]

MW: He wasn't - so it's quite - but he was so - he was so nice to meet. And I said oh yes we saw you, oh lovely did you enjoy it, it was - yes, he was quite genuinely pleased that somebody had seen the show and - I suppose round here, it's quite a hub this area in South London and London, you saw these people because they - it was just -

RW: Local act, The Kinks' Dave and Ray Davies. They were quite local.

MW: It was like the Status Quo, we've been up Epsom Downs. We saw them up there at racing, you know the evening racing. And a fair few tours we've been to.

RW: We like the Quo because they're not the least bit pretentious. This is it - this is what you get. This is

ordinary rock n roll. Terrific.

**[31:49] JZ: You know they're playing for us, for Creative Youth. We're all looking forward to that. Just going back to the - so this there's this one place that I'd love to know a bit more about it is this Folk Barge. This actually sailed down the Thames, right?**

RW: No.

MW: No.

RW: It was stationary.

MW: It wasn't going anywhere.

RW: If there was a particularly low tide you found it didn't move at all, because there was another barge that had sunk underneath it. And it stood on top of it. And it was only when the tide was quite high that it actually floated at all. And it was run by a - shall we say an unconventional sort of chap. As you would expect. If he took a dislike to you, you didn't come on. You didn't - you didn't come in.

**[32:47] JZ: Is this a guy called something Thompson - I don't know if you know the name of the guy. There's been this one guy we've been trying to track down, I don't think he's with us anymore.**

RW: No, that's - the reason the Folk Barge stopped I think was the proprietor died.

**[33:05] JZ: Yeah I think you're right. Here at Creative Youth we've recreated the Folk Barge and had it sail down - we had people - modern folk musicians and also someone who knew John Martyn quite well and this sort of stuff. Jan - have you got anything in mind? No no, that's fine, just making sure you're not suffering in silence. [Laughter] So I'd like to talk a bit - picking up on something you mentioned Margaret about the teenager and the wider - the music is a very key component but of a wider kind of cultural revolution I guess. So again were you - did you feel like you were part of a generation that was doing something very different? That was -**

MW: I think so because I know my sister - my grandmother was a seamstress and she said oh, when you're older I will make you a skirt like that. But by the time I got older no way did I want what my sister had had. And we were - wore trousers and the skirts got shorter and shorter and shorter. [Laughs]

RW: And shorter.

MW: And we had our own fashion and you saved your money, had a Saturday job, you saved up and to get the fashionable clothes. You didn't dress like your mother any longer. Up until then you did.

RW: I remember towards the end - it was towards the end of the 50s, wasn't it, I remember - I'd go out, I'd have the trilby hat. And the raincoat, the suit. You'd go out and then suddenly if I was going out - no, a pair of jeans. T-shirt. It was - certainly for the blokes it seemed to be a bit of an American culture that was coming in.

MW: It was the late 50s because I left school in '61. And I - yeah the fashion had definitely had changed. The shoes - colourful shoes. I remember having an orange pair of shoes.

RW: It was about 1960.

MW: And particular branding. There was this particular brand shoes you had to have. And yeah, it did change definitely. And stockings went out and you had tights, so you could get shorter and shorter

because you couldn't wear stockings and short skirts.

[Both laugh]

MW: No you had to have tights. When I say short, I mean short.

RW: I remember riding my motorcycle into the back of a bus looking at a girl going up the stairs.

MW: You couldn't bend over, you had to - [laughs]

**[36:16] JZ: And what in your guy's view was the reason for this change?**

MW: I think you had money didn't you?

RW: We had money to spend and there were marketing - there was clever marketing people marketing the style. You went to buy a pair of jeans and if you could afford it you got your pair of Levis jeans. And I still got my first pair of Levis jeans, they're shorts now. They're hanging up in the garage.

**[36:49] JZ: Really? Amazing.**

MW: I think it was - during the war people couldn't get new clothes. And by the late 50s it was availability wasn't it? You could - fashion [ ] these young kids. We will get them something more fashionable because you can do because it's there. It's available.

**[37:17] JZ: And you mentioned there was an Americanism about it. Was there a sense that this was all coming from America?**

RW: Yes.

MW: Well the jeans definitely were.

RW: There was the - didn't know what a t-shirt was until about 1959. [Laughs]

MW: What would we do without them now? [Laughs]

**[37:37] JZ: And was it important to you how you dressed when you went out and all the -**

RW: God yes. You got - school uniform, off with the school uniform and we put on some - yeah.

**[37:49] JZ: Good threads.**

RW: You've got to look hip, yeah.

MW: And stiletto heels. You wore - girls stiletto heels and the tights, straight skirt. Tight as you could get it. Stiletto heels. Stagger around.

RW: Oh the stiletto heels that I [ ] back together.

MW: You had to wear them - you wore them everywhere. You walked everywhere in them - you wouldn't go out without your heels. [Laughs]

**[38:19] JZ: And was there - for you was this rebellious? Were you being rebellious or were you just being different?**

MW: No, we were being different from your parents but not different from everybody else - like now, you look at the fashion today [ ] but if I was that age I'd be wearing them. And our parents the same. I suppose if I was that age - yeah because I look and think, no, there's nothing wrong with it. I'd wear that if I was their -

RW: Fitting in with the other youngsters. Because otherwise you'd look out of it.

**[38:56] JZ: It's all very interesting.**

MW: It hasn't changed - fashion hasn't changed because the kids now have to have that because that's what everybody wears now. And it was the same when - you like the next petticoats so [numerous] petticoats and how many you could have under your skirt. And if you could get away with them under your school skirt and things like that.

**[39:23] JZ: And were any of the musicians blazing a trail with the fashion? Your Elvises or whatnot.**

MW: The Beatles definitely.

RW: Yeah - I - yes, the Beatles with the haircuts and the suits and I remember buying a shirt because I'd seen the Everly Brothers wearing something similar. With the collar turned up. I actually remember posing in front of the mirror at home and I must have been sort of 16 or so. Guitar, the Everly Brothers shirt. This is hip.

**[40:03] JZ: I don't think I actually asked you Robin, what was the extent of the success of the skiffle group with Jimmy Page and-**

RW: We played a lot of local things, fetes and church socials and things. And then we - somehow we got on this television show. And we practised that and we'd do a couple of numbers on this television show. And then the next week we all sit down round the table at Jim Page's mum's in Miles Road, Epsom. And we - what are we gonna do now? Are we going to try and tour for - and [ ] said well we've got to get proper jobs. I think I was actually working then. But yeah, we got to work whereas Page's mum was willing to sponsor him to have more guitar lessons and become very proficient and professional. And that was it - we split.

**[41:04] JZ: And did you lose contact with Jimmy?**

RW: To a great extent yes.

MW: The drummer, he's still in contact with now.

RW: Talk to the drummer occasionally.

MW: And the drummer says he has - Jimmy Page has asked after him. When he did his big concert at O2, we thought ooh, we might get tickets but we didn't. Bit boring, we were hoping but we weren't going to pay - it was so expensive. No, he has asked. The drummer lives down near Southampton.

RW: The bass player died - I think there was some kind of accident. And I didn't like to - I could've contacted his mum. But I didn't like to - it was some ice too thin for me to tread on. I didn't want to upset anybody.

**[41:51] JZ: And do you - so was there a period of time when no contact and then you heard Led Zeppelin or you -**

RW: Well -

MW: It was that YouTube [bit that we got]

**[42:00] JZ: Was there a moment where you kind of went oh hold on, that's Jimmy.**

RW: Oh yeah. We knew about that. He'd gone - played in the Yardbirds because I saw the Yardbirds on one or two occasions and another good friend who's passed on, she and her sister used to follow the Yardbirds really avidly. And I was aware of Led Zeppelin and I didn't really think much of it. It was too far out for - it's the heavy metal - it wasn't me. Some of the folk things that they do - Black Mountain Side and things like that I rather like. But that - I wasn't madly keen on Led Zep. I have to say.

**[42:50] JZ: And then at some moment they just kind of exploded into the mainstream.**

RW: Oh yes. They started off big, Led Zeppelin. They started big because it was the - I don't know, you probably don't know the story that the Yardbirds -

**- JZ: I actually interviewed Top Topham from the Yardbirds -**

RW:- The Yardbirds were finished and they were talking about we wanna get a new band together with some of the people from The Yardbirds. And somebody says we'll call it the New Yardbirds. And I think it's reputedly - who is it - one - somebody famous said they'll go down like a led balloon, and somebody else - Bryan Jones - says it'll go down like a led zeppelin more likely. And that was the name.

**[43:38] JZ: It's a great name just to roll off the tongue. With the story behind it as well. We spoke with Top Topham who was the - one of the founding members of The Yardbirds. And he says when they first played they played as the New Yardbirds and then the Led Zeppelin name came off the back of that so, yeah. All very interesting. And you didn't stay in touch with Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel? [Laughs]**

MW: No, no.

RW: They were - they went back to America, I hope they're still alright.

[Laughter]

MW: Yes. And when you think back, oh I've met them. Oh! [Laughs]

RW: Another name that perhaps you should check for the locally for the folk music is Diz Disley. He was a guitarist in the genre of [pause] sort of acoustic jazz Django Reinhardt sort of thing. He was quite an expert on Django Reinhardt, that's with a D. Django with a D. Diz Disley - he was - I think he's passed on now.

MW: He did the folk in Epsom.

RW: He did the folk club yeah.

MW: Yes. I doubt if he - because he was very much [what he] at the time. [Laughs]

**[45:14] JZ: So I'm just trying summarise all your links to fame here. So you played with Jimmy Page. You saw Pete Green's Fleetwood Mac at the Toby Jug. You met Paul Simon. Who am I missing? There's definitely some that I'm missing here. [Laughs]**

RW: I never played with Peter King. But I flew model aeroplanes with him. Instead of taking amateur

pharmaceuticals, he'll build a model aeroplane.

**[45:49] JZ: Interesting. I've got loads to work with from this so - I mean if you guys have anything else you feel you want to say about this topic then please -**

MW: No I must admit I never was one to go to the concerts [this was] with school and that and, say we done Status Quo. Recently, so we tend to, like the O2 one was amazing. It was - it cost - there was four of us went. When I tot up what we spent to go - whether on the merchandise, oh we'll have it, that's £98 please. [Makes recoiling noise] Never mind. But it was worth every penny of the cost [ ] amazing.

RW: Interestingly Margaret mentioned about this change in dress. And probably demeanour of the - when teenagers got invented - looking back now I can see someone must have pulled the big switch and thou shalt not be like thy parents. This is what to do. This is - and somewhere someone turns a big switch.

MW: I don't think my sister really ever changed because she moved to Australia but seeing photos of her and what she was wearing latterly - she's been dead - she's some years now. But even seeing what she wore - even then and what I wear and I try not to go too young [inaudible] that is pushing it like a bit. But what I wear and I think what she - she never really changed.

RW: The generation - the half generation in front of us turned into their parents much earlier. I got a lovely quote for you about music. My father - this is - this would have been in the 50s. He said I don't know why you listen to that rubbish. All this pop music sounds the same to me. Now I think he's right.

MW: And our son who's 38 - he likes the 60s because there's music more I think than some -

RW: Occasionally the barn dance band will play in our other guise, Beige Sabbath. We'll play for a garden party or a birthday party or something like that. And we'll play sort of middle of the road stuff. And Georgia On My Mind. King of the Road. All that sort of stuff. And we're amazed that the reaction of the youngsters when we play a 60s rock n roll number. And these 13 to 16, 18 year olds - they think it's marvellous. That music's got something.

MW: Well when you think some of the stuff you hear now is 60s, 50s and then would you expect to be hearing it here 50 years later? This music - it's still happening. And still - people still want to hear it. You wouldn't have imagined at the time.

RW: Roll Over Beethoven comes on the radio, I'm still going to sit and listen to it. And I'm back in that little bedroom with my -

MW: Well some of the stuff we've had on ukeleles [young] stuff.

RW: The one that - a record that I remember pulling out - now this must have been much later. Later I was - I know I was driving to Guildford down the A3. I must have been going to work. So -

MW: 1990s.

RW: 1990s. And a record by a band called Poco came on. And I had to pull over to the side of the road to listen to it. Rose of Cimarron by Poco and I later found out that that was the band that predated the Eagles. It was some of the Eagles played in previously Poco. But that was - now and again there's a record that you hear and you think wow. Actually pull over, stop on the hard shoulder, listen to this. Then go to work.

**[50:27] JZ: Good on ya. Yeah - I'm a complete sort of devotee of the sort of 60s sound. And both sides of the Atlantic. This project has thrown up so many interesting stories. It's taken me months - and still figuring it out now - to compartmentalise all those genres and how they interacted and**

**the exact order it kind of came in. And all of that sort of thing.**

MW: Our son did discos for some while. And he - invariably he was doing 60s music.

RW: Yeah.

MW: On them. Sometimes you got a request and he did get the time when he was down to an iPod against - we've got CDs in our loft. And he went to minidiscs and then he got down just the iPod. It was 60s music most of the time he was doing. He hated it when he - he used to do - for one of the local churches they did a disco. Alternate instead of halloween they put on a disco. And those - they did it regularly. And he hated it because he had to have the modern music against what he liked. And it was kids. [Laughs] He didn't like - he went off it in the end. He did it for a while. But yeah - it's the CDs, wouldn't believe the CDs we've got. Simply because you had to keep them when he put them on minidiscs. You had to have the - we've still got them.

RW: Yes if you're going to play for money then you have to own the record.

MW: Now you can just have a little tiny -

**[52:08] JZ: We didn't actually talk much about buying records. Margaret, you said you didn't really have the money to buy. Did you buy records much Robin?**

RW: Not a great deal no.

**JZ: It was more the radio that you got your music.**

RW: Yes, yes.

MW: I think it was an expense. You could hear them on the radio. And they weren't cheap - if you think we weren't that amount.

RW: Sixty seven pence hapenny for a record.

MW: And that's quite a lot of weeks - what you were earning. And when I started work I earnt £300 a year. So it wasn't a lot of money really.

**[52:44] JZ: Do you remember there being record shops in the town?**

RW: Oh yeah.

MW: Oh yeah. And you listened to the record - you went in and you listened to it before you actually bought it. Presumably to check that it was alright. You went in this little booth and listened to it. You'd just pick it up.

**[53:06] JZ: And were there any particular record stores that were well known or -**

RW: Oh the one in Ewell -

MW: Turntable.

RW: Turntable. It was run by an unusual sort of chap.

MW: It was there for years. Years. I still see where it was.



RW: And he would get any record - if I heard a record, probably on AFN and decided I wanted it, he would get it for me. I remember him getting Stick Shift by the Jewells. Now I might still have that record at home. It's a beauty because it starts off - you hear someone fire up a rather large V18 engine. And a car pull away. And then the rock band comes in. And it finishes up with the police siren begins to take over the - beautiful.

MW: Don't have anything to play them on now though.

RW: No, no.

MW: We did sell a lot of our records. Somebody showed interest and we sold them to them. He was a collector. He was a policeman wasn't he? And he came round and bought them off us except the odd one.

**[54:24] JZ: Our sort of thematic focus of our whole exhibition is going to be the vinyl record itself. So that's why I was sort of asking about that.**

MW: We have got some of the old ones still.

RW: The vinyl record - now there may be other people that claim this but there was a chap called Donald Eccles who was very much involved with the first plastic records. I believe Decca put some of their 78s out on vinyl because I had a Lonnie Donegan record that was vinyl and it was from - unbreakable you see. And Donald - and he had a firm, D O and E Plastics at Redhill. That used to - the major thing that he did was he bought all the defective records - the rejects from all the record companies, cut the middle bit out - I don't think he had enough nous to make coasters out of them. And turn them back into the plastic granules that you made records out of. And on that same site there was a small operation going - a chap called Stanley Schofield. Sound Stories Records - and these would be recordings of locomotives pulling out of stations. And the TT motorbike races. And Grand Prix - the sound of machinery. Stanley Schofield. I don't know if he's still alive. But this Don Eccles he was the father of one of my mates - well two of - the two, both the sons were mates of mine. They were in the model aeroplane club.

MW: And it was very profitable business.

RW: Oh yes, yes.

MW: Very profitable business.

RW: Colin Eccles, the son, is very very rich as a result of it.

**[56:44] JZ: So just to clarify in my head - so he would get the discarded Decca Records and remove the biscuit - the little bit in the middle.**

RW: And turn those - that vinyl back into granules that could be used for pressing records. And I think they used to come not just from Decca - from lots of other - but that was latterly. But I'm pretty certain he was involved in the original invention of the plastic record. Because he -

**[57:16] JZ: That's an interesting angle. We're kind of looking at the -**

RW: Something that appeared for a short time and then went was - you'd buy a magazine and it would have a record on it. It was thin plastic but you'd put it in your turntable and it would play. And you'd get - it wouldn't last. It'd wear out. But it was a vinyl record and they gave them away with magazines.

MW: You could get them on cards as well.

RW: Because I remember having one - motorcycle mechanics and it had helping you diagnose faults on a motorcycle. This is what it sounds like when the big end's gone. [Motor noises] And this is it what it sounds like when one of the valve tappets is loose. And all these sounds -

MW: You could buy postcards couldn't you as well?

RW: Yes.

MW: At birthdays - a card - it was like a card that used to sing through the plastic on it.

RW: And you got quite a few plays out of it before it wore out.

MW: I'd forgotten about them.

RW: Well so had I until you mentioned it. [Laughs] The vinyl - I think Eccles was involved on that. He lived in Worcester Park.

**[58:41] JZ: Good stuff. Alright well -**

RW: You've got plenty there.

**JZ: Plenty there, plenty there. Good luck to the person transcribing it all. [Laughs]**